

# UNCEREMONIAL

NOTABLE PRINTS OF  
Maneswar Brahma



Published By: **Phanindra Talukdar** | Secretary

**Pragjyotish Centre for Cultural Research**, Guwahati (Assam)

Email: pccrj015@gmail.com | Call: 91 7086769350

Designed by: **Bhumilan Studio**, Orion Tower, 6th floor, G.S. Road, Guwahati.

Supported by: **Trailokya Bordoloi** | Asstt. Manager ( E/M/, PaHEP), NEEPCO Ltd. Arunachal Pradesh

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Price: ₹ 300/-

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NOTABLE PRINTS OF  
MANESWAR BRAHMA



CURATED BY  
AMIT MUKHOPADHYAY  
Art Historian & Curator



In Collaboration with  
**Assam State Museum**

**Pragjyotish Centre for Cultural Research**  
27th March to 4th April, 2019

## **FOREWORD**

Though we think that since the post-independence the art practice of North-eastern region has been in progressing state or manifested into divers voices rendering individual self-reflexivity, but the core subjective and visual linguistic analogy is yet a question of intervention. Intervention or enactment is itself a seeing; the seeing is indeed need of an open institutional pedagogy by questioning the fundamental proposition of collective dialect and cultural location. Perhaps, the mode of questioning or seeing is only a path to have its own cultural location, the identity, the political representation and aesthetics. Stating these streams of consciousness we again are being collective to see and the seeing.

**Phanindra Talukdar**

Secretary

Pragjyotish Centre for Cultural Research, Assam



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## NOTABLE PRINTS OF MANESWAR BRAHMA

### **Introduction**

What is print necessarily involves a transfer of the image? This transfer is meant to permit and does permit the duplication of the image. It is this possibility of multiplication which gives its peculiar/unique status to the print. However, the definition of print in broader terms of technology has transformed and changed radically ever since its beginning, it is no more restricted to paper only. Today printmaking extends far beyond the printmaking proper. But generally speaking or art historically speaking, printmaking is a kind of no man's land. Any artist who ventures into it has to and must carve out a territory of his/her own. And how does one understand and define one's own territory? It is not just how many years the artist has lived and worked as a printmaker, it is essentially his ability to convert his prints into “works of art”, which becomes an integral part of his creative output.

Maneswar is one such printmaker who has just not remained a printmaker but has been successful in establishing authorship of the singleness of the unique elements of social issues that has dominated his oeuvre. These social/political issues make Maneswar's prints as NOTABLE. Technically and aesthetically speaking, they are unceremonial and notable. For Maneswar, printmaking remained, very much an open field of vast possibilities of representing the unrepresentable hitherto not included in the practice of contemporary printmakers of Assam. His loyalties to printmaking as well as to the societal causes enable him to control of its production with a wider diffusion of his works without falling into the clutches of boredom of the eye or the conventionalities of form and content. This has become possible because of his passionate kinship to the social/political awareness of the specific realities of the life-world of the North-East.

### **The Background**

Broadly speaking, the print is an art of the bourgeoisie precisely because it was born at the time when a new bourgeoisie was formed and rising in Europe during the Renaissance. Albrecht Durer initiated popularising prints against the existing modes of art-making that are mainly fresco and studio painting. However, print still remained “private” thing in as much as it remained within the prerogatives of the affluent class, the multiplication qualities of the print and its intrinsic desire /will to dissimilate implied a broad democratic movement which laid the foundation of the “social history of print”:

*“In France, under the ancien regime (before 1789), the aristocracy addressed the Bourgeoisie through the medium of the print. After the revolution, the so-called “popular print” was actually a bourgeois print addressed to the people.”*  
*Michel Melot: The Nature and Role of the print, 1981.*

The social movements in Bengal during the 19th century gave rise to the idea of the popular print introducing to the general public the print as a culture of everyday life. The rising new middle class was hungry to lap up the different forms of print which critiqued the British as well as the corruption of the aristocracy. Images through Wood engravings, woodcuts were transported via the vernacular magazines, newspapers, periodicals etc. Similarly, social movements of the 1930s in various countries like USA, USSR Mexico, Germany, India, and China introduced the power and meaning of the print to the ordinary people. Following the footsteps of the USSR, China rediscovered its woodcut traditions. Inspired by the lithographs/engravings/etchings of Kathe Kollwitz, the Chinese founded woodcut workshops whose aim was in line with the political ambitions of the country. Similarly, in India, as the struggle against colonialism and anti-fascism gained momentum, the prints became the popular medium for protests.

### **Maneswar- the notable printmaker**

The prints of Maneswar are informed by the personal and social narratives that he weaves around the realities of the immediate surroundings. The images reflect on the unrelenting tension between the physical absence of the Bodo people who were exiled from their homeland and the intense struggle to return to the lands that were appropriated from them. So, what we are now facing is neither a Map nor a Territory, the struggle for Bodoland introduced a stream of consciousness in Maneswar's works bearing witness to occupation, appropriation, colonizing and in the process the violence that erupted engulfing both the private and public sphere. Maneswar takes up such issues in the nature of the conflict, resistance, land, food, language, culture, and DEATH.



Albercht Durer



Kathe Kollwitz, **Poverty**



Li Hua, **Help him come into the house as fast as possible**



Andrea Gomez Y Mendoza, **Mother Against War**

But it was not only the Bodoland movement, the entire North- East region like Nagaland, Manipur, Mizoram, Tripura where a large number of indigenous people inhabit were deprived economically, socially, culturally and politically from the mainstream life-system. Maneswar 's consciousness grew out of the struggle of the indigenous people to attain justice and equality for all suppression of the rights of the marginalized people of giving rise to violence. According to the German philosopher, Jurgen Habermas the outburst of violence in a particular society/nation can be linked to two reasons:

- 1)'violent uprooting of traditional ways of life"
- 2) Increase in inequality due to accelerated modernism and thus hegemonic power structures that crush the vulnerable section of the society.

Maneswar's lithographs are expressions of the tragedy that is unleashed by violence, which takes the form of an "interior" (the self/private/domestic), and the exterior (the region/nation). The specter of violence has loomed over the region for a long time, enough to spread to the life-world. Maneswar rarely builds a 'narrative" in the image, mostly they are singular, compact, tightly woven as if all his emotions are frozen. His lithograph series titled VICTIM is a testimony of his concern for the fallen. The severed limbs, isolated and fragmented almost looks like a life cut off from the BODY-POLITIC. It is essential is tragic yet his compassion of the dead is telling.

### **Time, Memory And Introspection**

Maneswar went to study printmaking in Kala Bhavana, Santiniketan. He was away from Assam for long period; this gave him the opportunity to learn the craft of printmaking which had a rich history of art as well as illustrious teachers like Nandalal Bose, Ramendranath Chakraborti, Manindra Bhushan Gupta, Somnath Hore, Sanat Kar, Lalu Prasad Shaw, Nirmalendu Das. Pinaki Baruah, Suranjan Basu to name a few. Santiniketan had a great impact on Maneswar both as learning in the classroom as well as the rich cultural heritage which gave him the leisure to soak him in the openness of nature, the idle hours, and to introspect and recall the violent days, the unhappy and tragic ends. He learned the techniques of printmaking and soaked himself with the quietude of life which shaped his life as an astute printmaker and a humble person. The physical distance from his home helped him to recollect the memories which crystalized in image making of the elements of human tragedy so powerful that it invokes love and compassion.

It will be interesting to observe how Maneswar's prints serve to understand the measurements of social and cultural time along with the discovery of the space, that is, his own living space. Maneswar's printed images evoke the notion of the print as a self-recording image, as both work and a record of the time lived.

**Amit Mukhopadhyay**

Art Historian and Curator

Kolkata, 10th March 2019



## **BODY, IDENTITY, POWER:** Reflections on a Conflicted History

What (and who) is a victim and what does this construction mean in historical and contemporary terms in Northeast India? This geographical space is the quintessential borderland, yet the challenge is to locate borders in the centre of our analysis. Conflict theorists suggest that one occurrence that often leads to victimhood is the withdrawal of colonial power, and that colonialism has been responsible for destabilizing an area and fomenting ethnic tension during the colonial period. Framed through geographical determinism and disjointedly administered by the British as a set of hills on the edge of the Indian mainland, the discourse around Northeast India has been one of absence and indifference, in both its colonial and postcolonial incarnations.

Originally, the Northeast was comprised of undivided Assam and the independent princely states of Manipur and Tripura. Being the gateway to the region, Assam has a rich assimilative cultural history of a shared homeland for a variety of ethnic, linguistic, religious and cultural groups. The divide and rule policy of the colonisers in the Assam Province since 1826, and the carving out of the federal states from Assam based on linguistic lines since the early 1960s, almost normalized the notion of 'exclusive ethnic homelands' combined with a culture of 'routine and unspectacular' violence. And old wounds keep resurfacing till our contemporary time, with a contested (and sometimes) manipulated amplification of Otherness.

When one sees the lithographs, woodcuts, and etching prints of Maneswar Brahma (b. 1967) that deal with victimhood, it traces these very effects of colonial and post-colonial occurrences in his home-state, Assam. Locating his practice through a personal and political lens, Brahma frames victimhood both as a perception of selfhood, and also the self in a system of relationships with history and remembrance. And what does he remember, and what makes his work reflective of the effects of ethnic struggle, of which he himself is witness and victim? It is a story of belonging and un-belonging, problematized through the insider/outsider matrix of the Assam Movement (1979-1985) and its consequent political and cultural hegemony that led to The Bodoland Movement (1987-2003).

Brahma studied printmaking (BFA, 1997/MFA, 1999) at Kalabhavana, Santiniketan, and in many ways, the history of this locale (particularly how printmaking was employed for social annotation), combined with the conflicts (of a Bodo identity) in his home-state shaped his practice. In 1995, as a student visiting Kokrajhar during summer vacations at Kalabhavana, a harrowing encounter with a militant outfit changed his life. Abducted soon after he alighted from the train at Kokrajhar, and shot (at close range) by extremists in a college campus in a case of a 'mistaken identity', Brahma has never understood the real reason for his abduction. The memory of this violent personal experience as a victim of militancy is represented in his Victim Series of this solo exhibition, while being contextualized in the political inscriptions of ethno-nationalisms in Assam.

Human bodies are sites where social differences are mapped and scripted, and often those in power justify various forms of discrimination. Insurgency and counter-insurgency played havoc on the lives of common citizens in Assam and also other parts of Northeast India. Brahma's own body (as a citizen) has been violated by political and social forces, and through his artistic agency, he narrates his story to the world. Functioning as a location for the circulation of identity and power, the artist's body bears scars of terror that remembers this incident every day, trying to find answers to his victimhood. In many ways, the processes of this violent act rather than the result emerge in his prints, investigating how fields of power are located in moments of history. Before the Bodoland Territorial Council was formed in 2003, the struggle for space and political representation of the Bodos has been manifold, and connected to the socio-economic distortion of a shared homeland.

While Brahma's represents his inhuman experience in autobiographical ways, he also brings attention to the larger human condition of terror and violence that marginalizes minorities, regionally and globally. If some works bear his self-portraiture surrounded with armed men, others depict dismembered and charred bodies against a hill (Assam) that bears stitches on its lacerated land, with bullets flying in the sky. The Unfinished Story series depicts the lack of closure to his experience, because he does not know who his perpetrators were, and still searches for them in subversive ways. It also leads me to the question, what is the politics of listening and speech? Who listens, who speaks, who understands, who heals? The lithographs *The Burning Head*, *Militarization* and *Safegaurd* perhaps offer us answers to the complexity of this conflicted space. *Safegaurd* is particularly intriguing because an armed man sits under an umbrella, alone or over a dead body. Whose side does this man represent – the State or the Rebel? The etching *Special Powers Act* is a critical comment on the controversial enforcement of the AFSPA in Northeast India that gave unbridled power to the armed forces to act at will in 'disturbed' areas.

Michel Foucault contended that power is a socialised and embodied phenomenon, and power struggles, including revolutions, do not always lead to changing the social order. He believed in the role of action and resistance through discourse, and the field of art does exactly that – building new forms of thinking and knowledge. Brahma's prints, at the level of artistic practice, opens out methods of discourse analysis to engage with a conflicted history, reflect on current normative language, and shape alternative meanings around aesthetics and politics.

**Amrita Gupta Singh**

Art Historian, Curator & Art Educationist, Mumbai

Do not figure out  
Woodcut  
40 x 52 cm  
1993



Drinking Rwsi (traditional drink of Bodo)  
Woodcut  
47 x 35  
1993







Seeing by other  
Lithography  
43 x 34 cm  
1995

Safeguard -i  
Lithography  
43 x 34 cm  
1995





Safeguard -ii  
Lithography  
43 x 34 cm  
1995



Away from light  
Intaglio  
12 x 12 cm  
1995



Victim-I  
Lithography  
70 x 55 cm  
1997



Victim-ii  
Etching  
12 x 12 cm  
1997



Victim-iii  
Lithography  
47 x 63 cm  
1997







Victim-iv  
Lithography  
62 x 49 cm  
1998



Victim-v  
Lithography  
70x 55 cm  
1998



Victim-vi  
Lithography  
70 x 55 cm  
1998



Militarization  
Lithography  
47 x 63 cm  
1998





Portrait of a farmer  
Lithography  
35 x 24 cm  
1999





Victim-vii  
Lithography  
86 x 65 cm  
1999



Burning Head  
Lithography  
34 x 48 cm  
1999



How she got rape  
Lithography  
52 x 67 cm  
1999



The Rock of Pokhran  
Lithography  
62 x 43 cm  
1999





Unfinished Story –ii  
Lithograph  
70x 55 cm  
2001



Victim-viii  
Lithograph  
70x55 cm  
2001



Victim-ix  
Lithography  
70 x 55 cm  
2001



Day Dream  
Lithography  
40x 30 cm  
2001





Maa  
Lithography  
86 x 65 cm  
2001



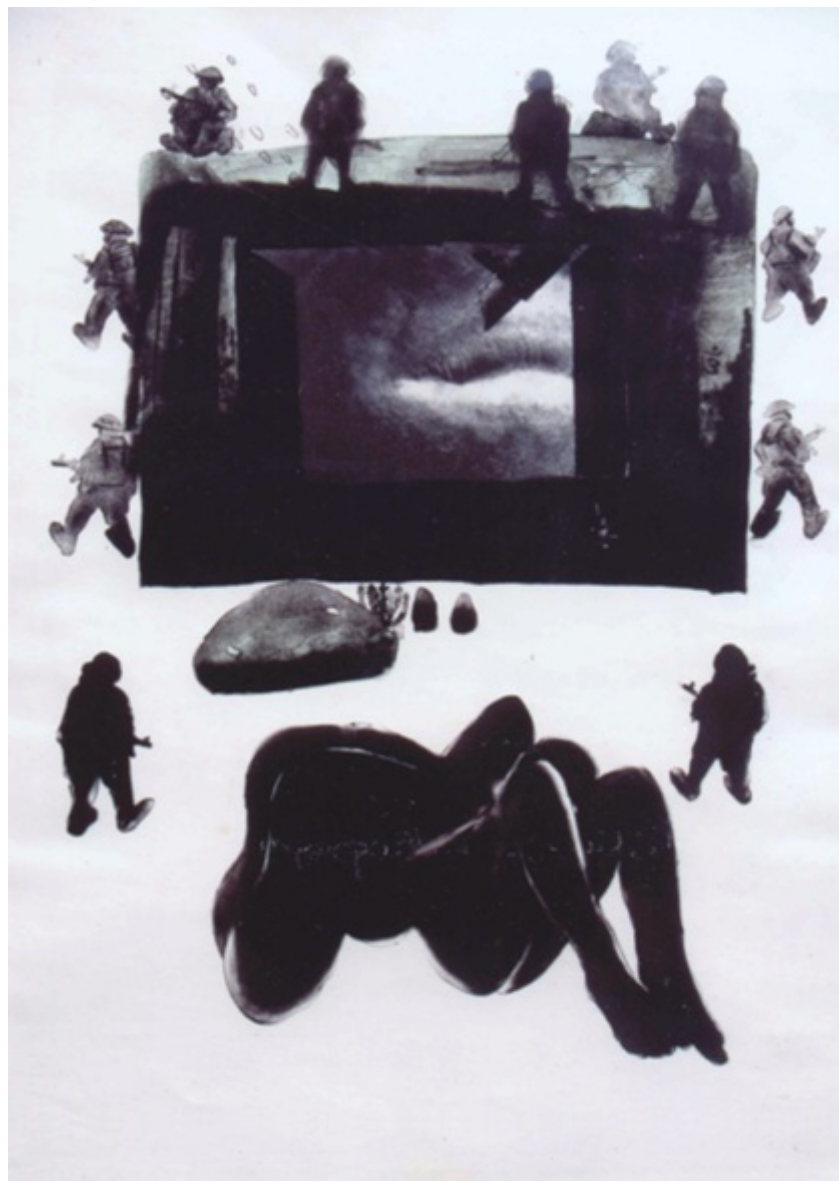
Victim-x  
Lithography  
70 x 55 cm  
2001



10th October 1995  
Lithography  
42 x 34 cm  
2001



Unfinished Story-iii  
Lithography  
70x 55 cm  
2004



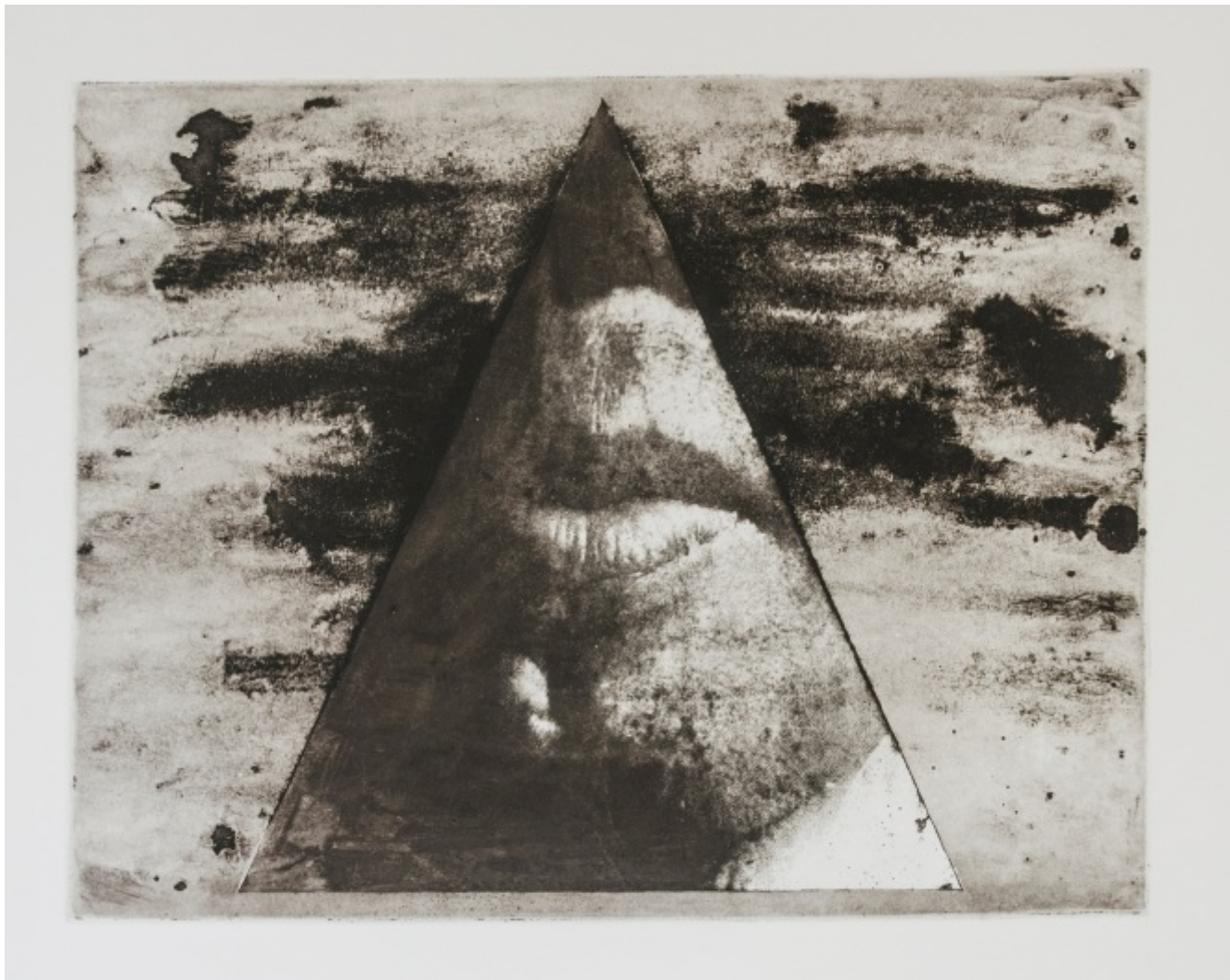




Special powers Act  
Etching  
22 x 27 cm  
2004

Special powers Act  
Lithography  
52x 52 cm  
2004





Self  
Lithography  
54x 54 cm  
2004



Unfinished Story -i  
Lithography  
70 x 55 cm  
2004



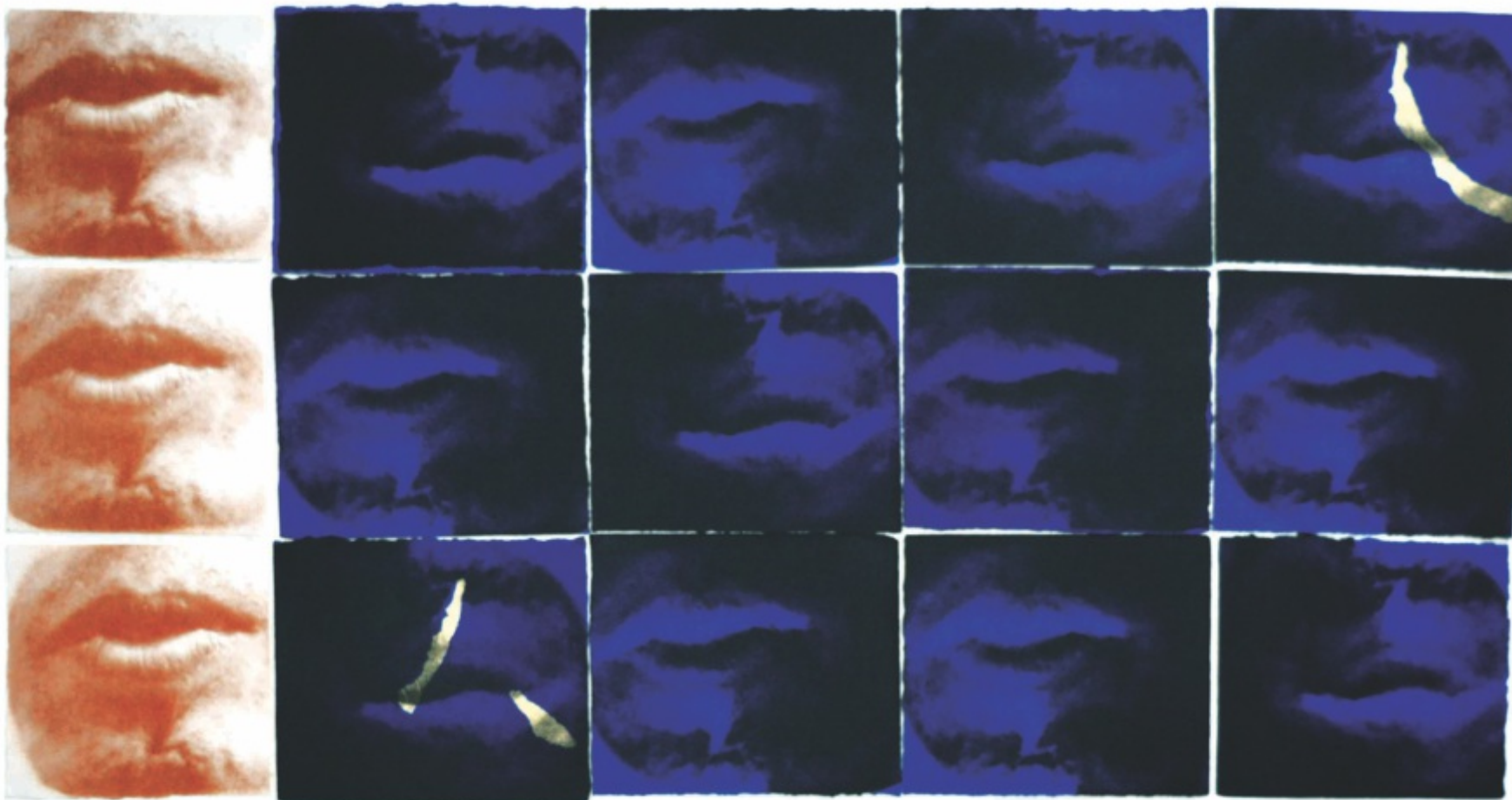




Self reflexive  
Etching  
30x 22 cm  
2007

Spring  
Etching  
28 x 36  
2007





Nightmare  
Lithography  
125 x 75 cm  
2005





Death of a Hero  
Etching  
32 x 32 cm  
2010





Title: Moon beam  
Medium: Etching  
Size: 31 x 31 cm  
2014

I met Goya in Kokrajhar  
Lithography  
45 x 34 cm  
2015



Meditation  
Lithography  
29 x 41 cm  
2018





Lost Civilization  
Woodcut  
54 x 115 cm  
2019





Lost Civilization-ii  
Woodcut  
54 x 115 cm  
2019



The Rock of Pokhran  
Lithography  
62 x 43 cm



Victim  
Lithography  
70 x 55 cm  
1997





## **MANESWAR BRAHMA**

Born in: 1967

Halipara Subhaijar, P.O. Ballamguri, Dist: Chirang, Bodoland,  
Assam, PIN-783393

+91 99578 65761

Email: maneswar67@gmail.com

Present address: Srimanta Sankaradeva Kalakshetra,  
Panjabari, Guwahati-37

B.F.A. in Printmaking in 1997 and M.F.A. (Advance Diploma) in  
Printmaking in 1999 from Kala Bhavana, Visva Bharati,  
Santiniketan, West Bengal.

### **EXHIBITION I PARTICIPATED:**

First Eastern Print Biennial Exhibition, Bhubaneswar, 1995.

Third Indian Drawing Biennial Exhibition, The Solids  
Chandigarh, 1996.

1st All India Avantika Graphic Exhibition in Delhi, 1996.

The Fourth Bharat Bhavan International Biennial of Prints, ,  
Bhopal, 1997.

63rd, 64th & 65th All India Exhibition of Art, in Amritsar. The  
Indian Academy of Fine Arts in 1997, 1998 & 1999.

31st Anniversary Annual Exhibition at Birla Akademi of Art &  
Culture, Kolkata, 1998.

12th All India Art Contest & Exhibition, South Central Zone  
Culture Centre, Nagpur in 1998 & 1999.





33rd Annual Exhibition, Birla Academy of Art & Culture, Kolkata in Millenium 2000.  
The 4th Art Access Week Exhibition, Birla Academy of Art & Culture, Worli, Mumbai, 2001.

State level Art Exhibition, All India Fine Arts & Crafts Society (AIFACS), at Srimanta Sankara deva Kalakshetra, Panjabari, Guwahati in 2002.

1st North East States Exhibition of Arts (NESEA) organized by Srimanta Sankaradeva Kalakshetra in 2004.

47th National Exhibition of Art, Lalit Kala Akademi, New Delhi at Lucknow 2004.

48th National Exhibition of Art Lalit Kala Akademi, New Delhi at National Gallery of Modern Art, Mumbai 2006.

## **INVITED EXHIBITION**

Participated in the 2nd Art Access Exhibition, at Birla Academy of Art and Culture, Worli, Mumbai. 1998.

Participated in the Event of H.K. Kejriwal young Artist Awardees Group Exhibition at Chitrakala Parishnath, Bangalore, India. Sponsored by Karnataka Chitra Kala Parishad 1999.

Participated in the Exhibition at Allience Francaise Art Gallery, Hyderabad. Sponsored by Allience Francaise de Hyderabad 2000.

Participated in the Awardees Group Exhibition at Birla Academy, Kolkata. Sponsored by Birla Academy of Art & Culture, Kolkata 2000.

Participated in Group Exhibition at Kalahita Art Gallery organized by Kalahita Art Gallery, Nagar jana, Hyderabad in 2006.

Participated in Contemporary Print Making Exhibition at Canvas Art Gallery, Kolkata, organised by Canvas Art Gallery, Kolkata, 2008.

Participated in Art Against Terrorism, organized by ECA Emami Chisel Art Gallery, Kolkata 2009.

Participated in the exhibition of Contemporary art of Assam, Organized by Association of Visual Artists, Assam at Srimanta Sankaradeva Kalakshetra, Guwahati, 2017.

'Contemporary printmaking of North East India' in 2018 by Pragjyotish Centre for Cultural Research, Srimanta Sankardeva Kalakshetra.

## **GROUP EXHIBITION:**

International Group Exhibition, Gallery KOXSIRATA in TIRKU and KANSAIN VALINEN YHSISTYS VANTAA in FINLAND In 1998.

India Japan Exchange Exhibition of Paint at SAGAArt College, Art Space SAGA Sponsored by SAGA Art College, Japan in 1999.

International Group Exhibition at AcademyAffaine Arts, Chandigarh in 1999.

Group Exhibition at Birla Academy, Art & Culture, Kolkata In 2001.

Group Exhibition at Chitra Kala Parishad, Bangalore in 2006.

Group Exhibition of Print Making at Bharat Bhavan, Bhopal 2008.

International Mask Exhibition Delhi and Dehradun organised by Nav Siddhartha Art Group in 2012.

The Bridge International Exhibition of Art at Neheru Wangchuk Art Gallery, Tiphu, Bhutan. Organized by Nrityanjali Academy, Guwahati and Neheru Wangchuk Cultural Centre, Bhutan In 2014.

## **AWARDS / SCHOLARSHIP:**

Assam Govt. State Scholarship for study from 1993 to 1996.

National Scholarship from Ministry of Human Resources Development, Department of Culture, New Delhi, Govt. of India 1998 to 2000.

H.K.Kejriwal young Artist Award, Karnataka Chitrakala Parishad Trust, Bangalore, 1999.

Birla Academy Award, Birla Academy of Art & Culture, Kolkata in millennium, 2000.

All India Fine Arts & Crafts Society (AIFACS) Award, at Srimanta San karadeva Kalakshetra, Panjabari, Guwahati in 2002.

1st North East States Award, organized by Srimanta Sankaradeva Kalakshetra in 2004.

National Akademi Award, Lalit Kala Akademi, New Delhi, held in Mumbai, 2006.

## **WORKSHOP :**

Invited in Printmaking Camp at Srimanta Sankaradeva Kalakshetra, organized by Srimanta Sankaradeva Kalakshetra, Guwahati, Assam in 2003.

Invited in Lithography Workshop at Kala Bhavan, Visva Bharati, Santiniketan, organized by Rashtriya Lalit kala Akademi, Regional Centre, Kolkata in 2004.

Invited in Edition making camp at Regional Centre, Kolkata, organized by Rashtriya Lalit Kala Akademi, Regional Centre, Kolkata in 2009.

Invited in National Print Making Camp, at MS Baroda University, Baroda organized by Rash triya Lalit Kala Akademi, New Delhi in 2009.

Invited in Print making Camp at Srimanta Sankaradeva Kalakshetra, Guwahati organized by Lalit Kala Akademi Regional Centre Bhubaneswar in 2010.

Invited in Painting Symposium at Brahmaputra Jungle Resort , Guwahati organized by Wonderlust Art Foundation, Baroda in 2010.

Invited in Art Camp at Don Bosco Institute, Kharghuli, Guwahati organized by Kanu Nayak Art Foundation, Mumbai in 2010.

Interactive workshop with North East Artists ( a multimedia camp) at Regional Centre, Chennai organized by Lalit Kala Akademi Regional Centre, Chennai in 2010.

Invited in painting workshop of the North East Art Festival organized by Lalit Kala Akademi in collaboration with Tourism and Cultural Dept. of Arunachal Pradesh, Itanagar in 2011.

Invited in Painting workshop at Lakshmikanta Das Memorial Kalabhumi organised by Lakshmi kanta Das Memorial Trust, Rongjuli, Assam in 2014

Invited in National painting workshop at Kalakshetra, Assam Organized by Lalit Kala Academy, Delhi in 2014

Invited in Printmaking camp at Pathway World School, Gurgaon organised by Pathway World School, Gurgaon, Hariyana in 2014.

Invited in National Painting workshop at Sikkim organized by Lalit Kala Academy, New Delhi in 2016.

Invited as Visiting artist at Pathway World School, Gurgaon organised by Pathway World School, Gurgaon, Hariyana, 2015.

Invited in international painting workshop at Tripura Govt. art collage organised by ONGC Ltd. and Tripura Govt. art collage, 2015.



**SEMINAR :**

Invited as Resource Person in the Seminar Cum Workshop on Mizo Folk/Traditional Art. Organized by North East Zone Cultural Centre, Dimapur and Art & Culture Department, Govt. of Mizoram in 2011.

Invited as a resource person for the refreshers course for interaction with the participants on Tribal Art of India, Evolution of Art and Print making of India in Bodo Dept., Gauhati University, 2011.

Invited in International painting symposium in connection with Shiva festival at Sivasagar, 2018.

Invited in International Painting symposium at Kokrajhar music & fine art college, Kokrajhar, Bodoland, 2018.

**CONTRIBUTION:**

Organised National Level Workshop of painting at Bhairabkunda, Odalguri, Bodoland, Assam in 2007

Worked as Camp Director in Painting Workshop at Shilpagram, Guwahati organized by North East Zone Cultural Centre, Ministry of Culture Govt. of India, Panjabari, Guwahati in 2010.

Organised child development and educational awareness camp 'Regeneration in route Nature' in international border area like Indo Bhutan and Bangladesh in 2009-10.

**COLLECTION**

Private Collection in Japan, Switzerland, Finland, Germany in India Gurgaon, Kolkata, Chandigarh, Bangaluru, Guwahati.



**Amit Mukhopadhyay** studied art history and art criticism from Faculty of Fine Arts, M. S. University, Vadodara. He is a Junior Research Fellow of the I.C.H.R, Fellow, Indian Institute of Advance Studies, Shimla, Senior Research Fellow of the Department of Culture, Delhi.

He worked as Editor and Regional Secretary, Lalit Kala Akademi, Delhi. He was Editor of Art Etc Magazine and Curator, Emami Chisel Art, Kolkata. He has written extensively for various journals and magazines. He curated major National and International shows in India and abroad. He lives and works in Kolkata.



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